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Diagnosis and Treatment of Disease

Illness was believed to be caused primarily by witchcraft and, secondarily, by the breaking of a taboo or by contagion. Headaches, bloated stomach (*pihl*) and stomach aches were among the common symptoms of bewitchment. The tremendous fear of black magic probably added greatly to the severity of these afflictions. During Quain's stay the women appeared to complain more of sorcery as a cause of their illnesses than did the men, but this self-diagnosis was not always accepted.

Trumaí concepts regarding contagion were generally loose, and they often fused with witchcraft beliefs. Contagion was acknowledged to be a possible cause of illness, but if death followed, it would in all probability be laid to sorcery. The Trumaí knew that epidemics of pulmonary diseases were associated with the coming of white men, and they were especially worried that when the rainy season arrived Quain would give them coughs and fevers. Indeed, one night when Quain complained of illness and retired to his hammock with a headache, this eventuality was vigorously discussed.

The Trumaí called such a threat *tun*, a word that can be translated only as a malignant influence causing disease. *Tun* was said to exist around sick people or in places where there was known to be danger of contamination. Thus, when several of the people of Jakwanari's household were sick, everyone avoided the house, for it was full of *tun*. Aloari said that the waterfront, also, was full of *tun*. He preferred to bathe from a pottery vessel outside his house. Ringworm, however, was known to be caused by natural means.

The word *okei*, while referring to sorcery under certain conditions, was also a general term for medicinal preparations. Thus, *okei* of various kinds were used in different stages of the life crisis rituals and also in the treatment of various ailments. Roots were extensively used for medicinal purposes. Maibu rubbed his wife's head with the extract of a root (*ipox*) when she had a headache. Another root (*murukuyu*) supplied the basic ingredient for eye drops, and still another was prescribed for ringworm.

The Trumaí were subject to severe boils which were treated by piercing. This was a woman's specialty, and it was usually done by the wife or a close relative of the afflicted person. All other curing, both secular and supernatural, was done by men. Herbal medicines were used exclusively for such ailments as ringworm, but most cures involved both botanical and supernatural means used in conjunction.

Illness was treated by both individual curers and group ceremonies. The practice of individual shamanistic curing, known as *jau'kath*, had much in common with similar arts throughout South America. The main techniques employed were tobacco smoke and sucking. Great

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He then started a song about the post in which he was joined by Nitvary and the women. After two repetitions, the women poured a bowl of the soup on Matiwana's head and shoulders, making a dripping mess of him. He retired amid general laughter. The second bowl of soup was then poured over the pole. A full explanation of the beliefs surrounding the *ole* posts was not obtained.

Due to the fact that Quain had only recently arrived in the village when the ceremony was held, there is also a lack of clarity in the system of relationships known as *ole aton*. The word "*aton*" means "pet" in Trumaí, but in the present context it applies to a temporary ceremonial identification between people, and between people and the *ole* posts. The interpersonal ties set up were only between persons of opposite sex. However, a man could have more than one woman for *aton*, and vice versa.

Kinship may be the determinant of these ties, but the data are inconclusive. Interestingly, the greatest number of *ole aton* relationships existed between people of the previously mentioned pairs of houses, suggesting a ceremonial reinforcement of this moiety-like arrangement.

Except for reciprocal gift-giving obligations, nothing is known of the behavioral roles called for by these connections. The owners of the *ole* posts were said to have their particular posts for *atons*. Their chief ceremonial duties were to peel and paint the pole, and supply it with food offerings. It may be hypothesized that the posts represent certain spirits with which individuals are identified, perhaps as the result of shamanistic experiences, as described by Oberg for the Kamayurá.[6]

During the *ole* ceremony, as during the cure described above, Quain was impressed by the lack of interest in the proceedings. Those who were not part of the immediate activity sat and smoked, indulging in the usual topics of conversation. The loose patterning and secularity which characterized the ritual bespoke the general lassitude that permeated all aspects of the culture.

The Piquí Ceremony

The *piquí (tsinon)* ceremony occurred at the end of the harvest of that fruit, during the first half of the rainy season. It was similar to the *ole* celebration, but not as lengthy nor as important. Quain's information on the festival, obtained from Aloari, is very limited. Jakwanari, the main functionary, occupied a position similar to that of Matiwana and Nitvary in the *ole* ceremony. As Aloari phrased it, "Jakwanari had *tsinon* as *aton*." There was house-to-house dancing by the women, accompanied by singing of a certain series of songs. At the end of the dancing Jakwanari's wife made a large quantity of *t'ak*, the *piquí* flour cake, which

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 60.